

Tambora language

Tambora is the poorly attested non-Austronesian (Papuan) language of the Tambora culture of central Sumbawa, in what is now Indonesia, that was wiped out by the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora. It was the westernmost known Papuan language^[2], and was relatively unusual among such languages in being the language of a maritime trading state, though contemporary Papuan trading states were also found off Halmahera in Ternate and Tidore.

Tambora	
Native to	Indonesia
Region	Sumbawa
Ethnicity	Tambora culture
Extinct	soon after 1815
Language family	unclassified, non-Austronesian based on existing basic vocabulary
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	xxt
Glottolog	tamb1257 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languid/id/tamb1257) ^[1]

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Vocabulary

One word list was collected prior to the eruption, published as Raffles (1817, 1830). It is clear from this that the language is not Austronesian; indeed, there are only a few Austronesian loans.^[2]

In the list below^[2], it is presumed that ⟨ng'⟩ transcribes [ŋ] and ⟨dj⟩ [dʒ]. Hyphen is possibly a glottal stop [?]. Two words are clearly Malay loans. Zollinger (1850) identified several possible loans from other Austronesian languages; Tambora was a regional trading power, so a number of loans might be expected. The connection with Timor, if not coincidence, would presumably be genetic, not a loan.^[2]

Tambora	gloss	Tambora	gloss
seenā (AN?)	'one'	maimpo	'foot'
kálāe	'two'	kiro	'blood'
nih	'three'	kóngkong	'day'
kude-in	'four'	tádung	'night'
kutélin	'five'	kidjum	'sleep'
báta-in	'six'	sílam	'dead'
kúmba	'seven'	si-yang (Z: Malay?)	'white'
koného	'eight'	naido	'black'
láli	'nine'	sámar	'good'
saróne	'ten'	gonóre	'bad'
sisaróne	'twenty'	maing'aing	'fire'
simári	'one hundred'	naino (Z: Madura)	'water'
doh (Bima)	'person'	góñong (Z: Malay?)	'earth'
sia-in (Z: Sangar)	'man'	ilah	'stone'
óna-yit	'woman'	kíwu	'pig'
homóri	'father'	kilaíngkong	'bird'
yelai	'mother'	andik (Z: Javanese)	'egg'
kokóre	'head'	karáyi	'fish'
saing'óre	'eye'	ingkong	'sun'
saing kóme	'nose'	mang'ong	'moon'
búlu (Malay)	'hair'	kingkong	'star'
sóntong	'teeth'	mákan (Malay)	'eat'
sumóre	'belly'	hok-hok (Z: German?)	'sit'
taintu (Timor?)	'hand'	moríhoh (Sanskrit?)	'God'

Analysis

Donohue notes that word lists of this size from other Indonesian languages with relatively small consonant inventories typically succeed in recording all consonants, so the same might be expected here, apart from consonants which could not be transcribed with Malay orthographic conventions, such as the implosives found in the region. *P* only occurs after *m*, and may be a reflex of *h*, as in other languages of the area. Overall, the phonemic profile is consistent with many languages of eastern Indonesia: that is, to the east but not to the west of Tambora.^[2]

Hok-hok 'sit' suggests verbal reduplication, but the only other verb, *makan*, is an obvious Malay loan.^[2]

Saing'óre 'eye', *saing kóme* 'nose', *sóntong* 'teeth', *sumóre* 'belly' all begin similarly, suggesting a prefix, possibly a possessive prefix, with a nasal *-ng'* that assimilates to a following consonant, and with *sumóre* 'belly' presumably from *more or *pore.^[2]

Several of the numbers begin with *sV-*, a common pattern in Austronesian languages where 'one' is reduced to a prefix. Indeed, *seena* 'one' is a possible Austronesian loan. Donohue suggests that *sarone* 'ten' ~ *sisarone* 'twenty' may reflect an earlier vigesimal system, possibly from *sa-* 'one' *doh* 'person' *-ne* (suffix), a common way of counting 'twenty' in the region. 'Twenty' might then have shifted to meaning 'ten' under the influence of decimal trading partners.^[2]

The word *morihoh* 'God' reflects a common term in the area, of uncertain but perhaps Sanskrit derivation. In Tambora, however, it also resembles *homóri* 'father', suggesting that neither word can be assumed to be native.^[2]

Donohue notes one word, *taintu* 'hand', which is plausibly connected to other Papuan languages, those of Timor and Alor to the east: Abui tay, Oirata tana, Kui tan. This leaves the *-tu* as a possible suffix, and the similar shape of *maimpo* 'foot' suggests to Donohue that these may derive from *tayn* and *maym* plus a suffix *-ho* or *-hu* which assimilates to the preceding consonant.^[2]

A number of words end in *-(k)ong* and *-ore*, and the former are semantically similar (*ingkong* 'sun', *kóngkong* 'day', *mang'ong* 'moon', *kingkong* 'star'), suggesting possible suffixes, though they might simply be coincidence.^[2]

See also

- [Tambora culture](#)

References

1. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Tambora" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tamb1257>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
2. Donohue, Mark (2008-01-03). "The Papuan Language of Tambora" (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/228921>). *Oceanic Linguistics*. 46 (2): 520–537. doi:10.1353/ol.2008.0014 (<https://doi.org/10.1353%2Fol.2008.0014>). ISSN 1527-9421 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/1527-9421>).

Further reading

- Stamford Raffles, 1817, 1830. *History of Java*, vol. 2, app. F, 198–199.

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